

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, CG

SUBJECT: ARMS SALES TO ZAIRE

1. DURING TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY EASUM IN NEW YORK OCTOBER 8 ZAIRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER UMBA DI LUTETE FOCUSED ON NEED FOR US COOPERATION IN STRENGTHENING ZAIRE'S MILITARY DEFENSE CAPABILITY, AND SUPPORT FOR FNLA LEADER HOLDEN ROBERTO IN ANGOLA (REPORTED SEPARATELY).

2. UMBA BEGAN PRESENTATION BY RECALLING HIS TALKS IN WASHINGTON WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER AND UNDER SECRETARY SISCO AND WITH AMB. HINTON IN KINSHASA. HE SAID GOZ WAS SATISFIED WITH SOME ELEMENTS OF US-ZAIRE RELATIONS BUT NOT WITH OTHERS. FOR EXAMPLE, GOZ HAD BEEN VERY PLEASED BY US DECISION TO SELL M-16S. BUT ZAIRE HAS OTHER NEEDS IN DEFENSE FIELD AND PAST EFFORTS TO EXPLORE THEM WITH USG HAD OFTEN BEEN MET BY EQUIVOCAL RESPONSES. COUNTRIES EAST OF ZAIRE WERE BEING ARMED BY SOVIET UNION AND THERE WAS NEED TO DEFEND ZAIRE AGAINST "LUNATIC" AMIN IN UGANDA WHO DREAMS OF OCCUPYING ZAIRIAN TERRITORY WITH HIS SOVIET-SUPPLIED TANKS AND MIGS. MOREOVER, A NUMBER OF STRATEGIC POINTS IN ZAIRE, SUCH AS KEY DAMS AND POWER PLANTS, NEEDED DEFENSE AGAINST AIR ATTACKS FROM
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WHATEVER SOURCE. GOZ HAS ALREADY REACHED ADVANCED STAGES

OF TALKS WITH SOVIETS AND OTHER POTENTIAL COMMUNIST SUPPLIERS AND MOBUTU WILL DISCUSS THESE MATTERS DURING

VISIT TO MOSCOW BEGINNING DECEMBER 9. HOWEVER, MOBUTU FEARS SOVIET ATTEMPTS TO USE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO INFILTRATE ZAIRE'S ARMY AND IT IS THEREFORE IMPORTANT FOR HIM TO KNOW BEFORE HIS TRIP WHETHER OR NOT AS ALTERNATIVE ZAIRE WOULD BE ABLE TO ACQUIRE NEEDED MILITARY ITEMS FROM US.

3. EASUM EXPLAINED WE HAD VERY REAL PROBLEMS IN MEETING REQUESTS FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WERE BUDGETARY CEILINGS AND RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY CONGRESS. UMBA INTERRUPTED TO STRESS THAT FOR ZAIRE IT WAS NOT A QUESTION OF SEEKING MILITARY AID. GOZ WAS PREPARED TO PURCHASE MILITARY ITEMS AND WAS NOT LOOKING FOR ANY "GIFTS" FROM US OR, FOR THAT MATTER, FROM COMMUNIST STATES EITHER. ZAIRE'S MAIN CONCERN WAS WHETHER US POLICIES RESTRICTING EXPORTS OF CERTAIN TYPES OF ARMS (E.G., FORMER BAN ON M-16S TO AFRICA) WOULD PREVENT GOZ FROM BUYING EQUIPMENT IT NEEDED NOW. IN THIS CONNECTION, UMBA ASSERTED THAT THE US NEED HAVE NO FEARS THAT ZAIRE WOULD USE ARMS TO ATTACK PORTUGUESE IN ANGOLA. IF THERE SHOULD BE NO POLICY PROBLEMS FOR US, HE SAID, THEN GOZ'S CONCERNS WOULD RELATE ONLY TO TERMS COMMON TO COMMERCIAL TRANSACTIONS, SUCH AS AVAILABILITY, PRICE, DELIVERY SCHEDULES, ETC.

4. EASUM EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT THERE WOULD BE MUCH DIFFICULTY WITH RESPECT TO US POLICY; ALTHOUGH WE WOULD HAVE TO RESERVE ON THIS POINT UNTIL WE HAD MORE PRECISE INDICATIONS OF WHAT ZAIRE WANTED AND IN WHAT QUANTITIES. HE CAUTIONED, HOWEVER, THAT LONG DELIVERY DELAYS AND HIGH COSTS FOR SOME ITEMS, SUCH AS TANKS AND SOPHISTICATED HARDWARE, COULD PROVE TROUBLESOME. EASUM SAID US, WITHIN CONTEXT OF OUR GENERAL VIEW THAT THERE IS PLENTY OF ROOM FOR ALL COUNTRIES TO ASSIST AFRICA, HAD NO OBJECTION TO SOVIETS HELPING ZAIRE WITH SOME OF ITS LEGITIMATE DEFENSE REQUIREMENTS IF THAT IS WHAT GOZ WANTED. US WAS PLEASED, HOWEVER, THAT ZAIRE TURNING
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TO US FOR ASSISTANCE IN THIS FIELD AND WE WOULD DO ALL WE COULD WITHIN PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO ZAIRE'S REQUESTS. UMBA SAID HE UNDERSTOOD GOZ WOULD BE CONVEYING ITS NEEDS TO US IN WRITING IN KINSHASA VERY SOON.

5. COMMENT. IT WAS NOT CLEAR FROM THIS CONVERSATION WHETHER OR TO WHAT EXTENT GOZ WOULD BE WILLING TO BUY ARMS

FOR CASH RATHER THAN CREDIT. NOR ARE WE CONVINCED THAT
UMBA IS FULLY KNOWLEDGEABLE ON SUCH MATTERS OR THAT HIS
VIEWS WOULD NECESSARILY BE SHARED BY OTHERS IN GOZ/FAZ.

PRESUME GOZ STILL REGARDS CREDIT PURCHASES ON SOFTEST
TERMS POSSIBLE AS IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN ZAIRE'S OVER-ALL
DEBT MANAGEMENT. EMBASSY MAY WISH TO EXPLORE THESE
POINTS FURTHER. INGERSOLL

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